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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to compare the freshman experience of commuter and residents students at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP) who were studied as part of the Maryland Longitudinal Study. Residents, dependent commuters, and independent commuters in the Representative Sample (434 students representing all ethnic groups at the university) and the Black Group (303 Black students) were compared in regard to reasons for choosing UMCP, academic expectations, employment, involvement, interpersonal relationships, sources of support and encouragement, institutional identification, and satisfaction. Results showed that commuter and resident students arrive with similar aptitudes (as reflected by their SAT scores) and with similar expectations for academic success. They begin their college experience with equal degrees of identification with the institution and with basically equal levels of satisfaction with college. However, as early as the second semester of their freshman year, commuters, especially dependent commuters, are significantly less involved in key aspects of campus life, i.e., on-campus jobs, student organizations, and relationships with people affiliated with UMCP. Data are reported in 10 tables, and the implications of the results for faculty and staff are discussed. Contains 15 references. (KM)

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MLS RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

Maryland
Longitudinal Study

Research Report #3

THE FRESHMAN EXPERIENCE AT UMCP: COMPARING COMMUTER AND RESIDENT STUDENTS

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Maryland Longitudinal Study Steering Committee
Division of Student Affairs
The University of Maryland College Park
Spring 1987

MLS

Maryland Longitudinal Study

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

RESEARCH REPORT #3

THE FRESHMAN EXPERIENCE AT UMCP: COMPARING COMMUTER AND RESIDENT STUDENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to compare the freshman experience of commuter and resident students at The University of Maryland College Park who were studied as part of the Maryland Longitudinal Study (MLS). Residents, dependent commuters, and independent commuters were compared in the following areas, which were selected because of their prevalence in national studies of college students: (1) reasons for choosing UMCP, (2) academic expectations, (3) employment, (4) involvement, (5) interpersonal relationships, (6) sources of support and encouragement, (7) institutional identification, and (8) satisfaction.

Resident students in both the Representative Sample and the Black Group tended to choose UMCP because of its academic programs, although they did not have significantly higher academic expectations than the other two residence groups. Residents were far less likely to be employed than commuters. Those who were employed worked significantly fewer hours and more frequently held jobs on, rather than off, campus. Resident students were significantly more involved in student organizations and spent more time with persons affiliated with UMCP than either dependent or independent commuters. Residents were slightly, but not significantly, more satisfied with their college experience than commuters.

Looking at dependent commuters, a very different picture emerges. Dependent commuters in the Representative Sample most often chose UMCP because of its location and inexpensive tuition. They were significantly more likely to be employed and worked more hours than students in the other residence groups. The vast majority worked at off-campus jobs and were significantly less involved than resident students in interpersonal relationships and organizations at UMCP. Black dependent commuters tended to work less than dependent commuters in the Representative Sample. Dependent commuters were more likely to associate with persons not affiliated with UMCP and to identify individuals with whom they attended high school as their best friends.

Independent commuters chose UMCP most frequently because of its location and academic programs, with the latter reason being cited most often in the Black Group. Independent commuters in the Representative Sample worked more than residents but less than dependent commuters. The Black Group was different in that independent commuters were more likely to be employed and to work more hours than black students in either of the other two residence groups. Independent commuters in the Representative Sample were more involved in interpersonal relationships with fellow students than dependent commuters, but not as involved as residents. They were approximately as involved as residents in student organizations and overall. In the Black Group, independent commuters reported less overall involvement than residents. Black independent commuters most often identified with high school friends and chose as their best friend someone from their work situation. Those in the Representative Sample were more likely to report their off-campus roommates as the persons with whom they identified.

This report shows that commuter and resident students arrive at UMCP with similar aptitudes (as reflected by their SAT scores) and with similar expectations for academic success. They begin their college experience with equal degrees of identification with the institution they have selected and with basically equal levels of satisfaction with college. However, **as early as the second semester of their freshman year, commuters — especially dependent commuters — are significantly less involved in key aspects of campus life, *i.e.*, on-campus jobs, student organizations, and relationships with persons affiliated with UMCP.**

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Maryland Longitudinal Study Steering Committee
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THE FRESHMAN EXPERIENCE AT UMCP: COMPARING COMMUTER AND RESIDENT STUDENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1970's, literature on college students has focused a good deal of attention on the effects of place of residence — particularly during the freshman year — on the quality of the college experience and on students' likelihood of persisting to graduation (National Clearinghouse for Commuter Programs, 1983). Commuter students, defined as those who do not live in campus residence halls, have been described by Chickering (1974) as the "have nots" of the college community, with students who live in residence halls being the "haves." Commuting to college has been associated with a lack of commitment to college (Astin, 1985; Beal and Noel, 1980; Schuchman, 1974; Velez, 1985), lower satisfaction with college, and less involvement in campus activities (Astin, 1975; Chickering, 1974; Harrington, 1972). Commuters are also generally characterized as working more hours than residents, often in off-campus jobs, and as having lower academic expectations. These characteristics are of special interest because of their probable relevance to retention (Astin; Velez). A recent study by Velez of a random sample of 3,169 students across the nation found that students living on campus were 43% more likely to graduate than those living off campus.

Commuting to campus, rather than living in residence halls, has a significant impact on the quality of the college experience. Wilmes and Quade (1986) describe some of the concerns which are shared by the 83% of college students nationwide who commute:

1. **Mobility issues.** The most obvious concerns commuters share are those related to transportation to campus: vehicle maintenance and reliability, parking, inclement weather, finding alternative modes of transportation, reliance on fixed transportation schedules, amount of time spent commuting, and security. As a result of mobility concerns, commuter students often concentrate their classes into less frequent, tightly packed time periods. Such schedules may impede students' from spending time on campus with other students and faculty members and may discourage them from taking advantage of out-of-classroom opportunities.
2. **Multiple life roles.** For most commuters, being a student is only one of several important and demanding roles. In addition to classes, commuter students often hold a job, care for a child or other relative, and/or manage household responsibilities. With each additional role, the complexity of the student's life increases and schedule flexibility decreases. The perceived value of curricular and co-curricular activities becomes a critical factor in making time management decisions.
3. **Integrating support systems.** The entire support network for a commuting student generally exists outside the campus. Parents, spouses, children, employers, high school friends, coworkers, may all be significant sources of advice and encouragement. In order for them to provide optimal support to the commuter, however, they must be integrated to some degree into the student's collegiate life. Unfortunately, upon entering college, many commuters experience a dissonance between their on- and off-campus lives that is difficult to overcome. Each semester, negotiations with family, employers, and friends are required to establish priorities, time commitments, and responsibilities. In cases where the significant others are unfamiliar with the campus, its demands, and its opportunities, these negotiations can become even more complicated. Instead of receiving understanding and support for new roles on campus, the commuter may encounter the increased stress of needing to explain and justify them at home and at work.
4. **Developing a sense of belonging.** Many commuter students complain of feeling "unconnected" to the campus. All too often, institutions perpetuate a variety of unintentional roadblocks that inhibit the commuter student's ability to develop a sense of belonging. Some institutions fail to provide adequate on-campus study and lounge space for commuters. Others take great care to mail information about campus events directly to students in the residence halls and put up a flier or two for commuters. Commuters can experience disenfranchisement from college life in other more subtle ways as well. Faculty, staff, and students themselves often carry deeply ingrained stereotypes about what college life is really like: "real college students" live on campus. Television, movies, and books about the good old college days portray students living together on campus, having riotous parties, and playing pranks on one another.

The 1984 report on involvement in learning by the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education echoes these concerns. This document cites involvement in learning — defined as the amount of time, energy, and effort students devote to the learning process — as the most important condition for improving undergraduate education. Involvement is described behaviorally as follows:

> Highly involved students demonstrate their commitment in a variety of ways: by devoting considerable energy to studying, by working at on-campus rather than off-campus jobs, by participating actively in student organizations, and by interacting frequently with faculty members and student peers. Conversely, uninvolved students may neglect studies, spend little time on campus, abstain from extracurricular activities, have little contact with faculty members or other students, and otherwise participate little in institutional life.

The Study Group recognizes that resident students are more likely than commuter students to become strongly involved in learning and in campus life simply because of the amount of time they spend on campus. The first recommendation made by the Study Group stresses the importance of focusing attention on first-year students.

Consequently, **the purpose of this Maryland Longitudinal Study Research Report** (the third in the series[1]) **is to compare the freshman experience of commuter and resident students at The University of Maryland College Park (UMCP).** This report is intended to serve as a baseline for subsequent longitudinal reports comparing the experiences of UMCP commuter and resident students to determine whether differences such as those found in national studies exist among students on this campus. It is important to note that **data utilized in this report were collected in spring, 1981, during the students' freshman year**—the first year of the Maryland Longitudinal Study (hereafter, MLS).

Even though these data were collected after a relatively small amount of time spent at UMCP, some significant differences among residence groups and some similarities to the conclusions of the national studies were found. **It may be hypothesized that analysis of data collected from MLS participants in their junior and senior years would reveal more differences among residence groups at UMCP and further illustrate similarities between UMCP students and those studied nationally.** Although the findings of this report are interesting and indicative of some important aspects of the freshman experience at UMCP, they are not necessarily generalizable to students' experiences after the first year.

For this report, students were grouped as follows by their freshman year place of residence: (1) residents, defined as students living in the residence halls; (2) dependent commuters, defined as students living at home with parent(s) or other relatives; and (3) independent commuters, defined as students in such living situations as apartments, private rooms, and student houses. Students who failed to designate their residence status were excluded from this report.[2]

The MLS Representative Sample is based on a random sample of freshmen selected from the entering class of fall, 1980. This sample is a cross section of the larger freshman class and, as such, contains a representative group of minorities — including approximately 10% black students. Consequently, it is important to keep in mind that the Representative Sample is not a "white" sample, but instead reflects the ethnic diversity at UMCP.

Because of the Division of Student Affairs' strong interest in the collegiate experience of black students on campus and the relatively small number of blacks in the freshman class of 1980-81, all black freshmen not included in the Representative Sample were also invited to participate in MLS. Those black students who agreed to participate became members of the "Black Group".

For purposes of analysis, the Black Group (consisting of all the black freshmen not already selected as part of the Representative Sample as well as the blacks in the Representative Sample) comprises the black individuals studied in this report. Using data from the black students in the Representative Sample and adding them into the Black Group was done for two reasons. First, as large a group as possible was desirable because of the relatively small numbers of black students in the original freshman class, and attrition over the years of the longitudinal study would reduce the number of study participants. Second, the intention in the selection of the Black Group was the testing of the total available (and willing) population, rather than of a specified "sample" as was the case with the Representative Sample. Consequently, for purposes of analysis, the black students in the Representative Sample do "double duty" in these analyses by being members of the "Black Group" and members of the Representative Sample.

Section II briefly describes the population surveyed in terms of sex, race, and other characteristics. Section III presents results, highlighting differences by residence group. Section IV summarizes the major findings by profiling each residence group and suggests implications of these findings.

II: PARTICIPANTS

Demographic data describing each residence group are presented in Table 1. Overall, 49% (n=213) of the students in the Representative Sample were residents, 38% (n=168) were dependent commuters, and 12% (n=53) were independent commuters during the freshman year. In the Black Group, 66% (n=200) lived in the residence halls, 27% (n=83) were dependent commuters, and 7% (n=20) were independent commuters. In the Representative Sample, more females than males were resident students, while more males were dependent commuters. There were no real differences in place of residence by sex in the Black Group, although slightly more black females lived in the residence halls.

In terms of race, proportionally more black students from among students in the Representative Sample were residents, and fewer were dependent commuters. The racial category accounting for the next highest percentage residents was students who identify themselves as "white", with students categorized as "other" comprising the lowest percentage. About the same proportion of white and "other" students were dependent commuters. "Other" students represented a greater percentage of independent commuters than did either of the two other racial groups.

Dependent commuters in the Representative Sample had marginally higher SAT verbal scores than either of the other two residence groups, although the three groups had similar scores. Likewise, SAT math scores were quite similar, with both dependent and independent commuters having scored slightly higher than residents. In the Black Group, independent commuters had the highest SAT verbal scores, while dependent commuters had marginally higher SAT math scores.

Official university records reveal that fall, 1980 grade-point averages for students in all three residence groups in the Representative Sample and the Black Group were similar. Residents had slightly higher GPAs, followed by dependent commuters and independent commuters in that order.

TABLE 1

Demographic Characteristics by Residence Group Representative Sample (n=445)

Characteristic	Resident (n=213)	Dependent Commuter (n=168)	Independent Commuter (n=53)	Overall*
Sex				
Male	37%	50%	13%	49%
Female	61%	28%	11%	51%
Race				
White	48%	40%	13%	84%
Black	72%	28%	—	10%
Other	32%	36%	32%	6%
SATV	451	460	455	455
SATM	504	520	521	512
Fall 1980 GPA	2.5	2.4	2.3	2.4

Black Group (n=322)

Characteristic	Resident (n=200)	Dependent Commuter (n=83)	Independent Commuter (n=20)	Overall*
Sex				
Male	63%	28%	10%	34%
Female	68%	27%	5%	66%
SATV	384	388	401	386
SATM	408	414	411	410
Fall 1980 GPA	1.9	1.8	1.6	1.9

Note: Values represent percentages of the total number of students in each residence group who provided valid responses. Eleven students in the Represenatative Sample and 19 in the Black Group did not indicate residence status; therefore, n's reported for the three residence groups do not equal the total n's for the Representative Sample or the Black Group. See endnote 2.

*Values in the Overall column represent percentages of the total n. SATV and SATM scores in this column represent the mean scores for the Representative Sample and the Black Group.

III. RESULTS

The results presented in this section are categorized into eight topic areas selected because of their prevalence in the national studies cited in Section II: They include: (1) reasons for choosing UMCP, (2) academic expectations, (3) employment, (4) involvement, (5) interpersonal relationships, (6) sources of support and encouragement, (7) institutional identification, and (8) satisfaction.

Reasons for Choosing UMCP

MLS researchers explored in depth the reasons why freshman students chose to attend UMCP. Although the UMCP Counseling Center includes a question on its annual survey of freshman students which asks students why they chose UMCP, no other research has been located which analyzes reasons for college choice by place of residence in the freshman year.

In the Representative Sample, there were significant differences among the groups in the reasons given for choosing UMCP. The two reasons most frequently reported by resident students were academic programs (35%) and location (21%). Dependent commuters more often cited location (33%) and inexpensive tuition (30%), while independent commuters came to UMCP because of its location (29%) and academic programs (27%). These findings are similar to those of a UMCP Counseling Center study of 1976 freshman commuters (Lea, Sedlacek, and Stewart, 1977), except that the latter study found that independent commuters were more likely to choose UMCP because of its academic programs. A UMCP Counseling Center Survey of 1985 incoming freshman (Thompson and Sedlacek, 1985) found that 34% of all students chose UMCP because of its academic programs, 24% because of location, and 14% because of its reasonable cost. **Students in the Black Group differed somewhat from those in the Representative Sample with regard to their reasons for choosing UMCP:** in all three residence categories they chose UMCP most often because of its academic programs and secondly because of its location. Table 2 details these results.

TABLE 2

Reasons for Students' Choice of UMCP by Residence Group

Reason	Resident	Dependent Commuter	Independent Commuter
Representative Sample (n=417)			
Academic programs	35%*	26%	27%
Location	21%	33%	29%
Inexpensive	20%	30%	19%
Friends/relatives attend	11%	7%	6%
Not accepted elsewhere	5%	2%	10%
Miscellaneous	8%	2%	8%
Black Group (n=292)			
Academic programs	39%	35%	37%
Location	27%	23%	26%
Inexpensive	6%	21%	21%
Friends/relatives attend	12%	17%	5%
Not accepted elsewhere	4%	1%	5%
Miscellaneous	13%	2%	5%

***Note:** Numbers represent percentages of the total number of students in that residence group.

Academic Expectations

Academic expectations upon entering the institution are related to students' reasons for selecting UMCP. Commuter students have been characterized as having lower academic expectations than resident students, rating their abilities lower than do residents, and lacking self-confidence (Chickering, 1974; Harrington, 1972). However, a study of 1976 freshman commuters at UMCP found that commuters' and residents' educational aspirations were basically equal (Lea, Sedlacek, and Stewart, 1977). Several questions related to these issues were included in the MLS in order to determine if there were differences among the three residence groups on the following variables: (1) expectations to obtain an overall GPA of A- or better, (2) expectations to graduate with honors, and (3) expectations to be elected to an academic honor society.

No significant differences in academic expectations by residence status were found among students in both the Representative Sample and the Black Group. Residents, dependent commuters, and independent commuter students reported essentially the same expectations of obtaining an overall GPA of A- or better, graduating with honors, and being elected to an honor society. Mean responses to all items fell between 2.1 and 2.6 on a five-point scale.

Patterns of academic expectations in the Black Group were quite uniform, **with black students in every residence group having slightly higher expectations than students in the Representative Sample.** The means in each area are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Mean Academic Expectation Levels by Residence Group

Area of academic expectation	Residence Group: Resident	Dependent Commuter	Independent Commuter
Representative Sample (n=429)			
Obtain A- GPA	2.4*	2.4	2.4
Graduate with honors	2.4	2.4	2.3
Be elected to honor society	2.2	2.2	2.1
Black Group (n=298)			
Obtain A- GPA	2.4	2.4	2.4
Graduate with honors	2.5	2.6	2.6
Be elected to honor society	2.4	2.5	2.4

*Note: Means were calculated from responses on the following scale: 1= no chance, 2= very little chance, 3=some chance, 4= very good chance.

Employment

Noel, Levitz, and Saluri (1985) consider the demands made by employment as one of the major forces mitigating against college student retention. Astin (1985) found that working full-time has a negative effect on persistence; however, part-time, on-campus employment and work-study employment are associated with higher retention rates. Chickering (1974), Stewart (1983), and Velez (1985) found that more commuter than resident students are employed.

A comparison of the employment patterns of residents, dependent and independent commuters reveals highly significant differences. Nearly three-fourths (73%) of the resident students in the Representative Sample indicated that they were not working at all. In contrast, only 35% of the dependent commuters were not employed. Of the independent commuters, 57% reported not working at the time they answered the questionnaire.

For those in the Representative Sample who were employed, some interesting and significant differences were found as far as the number of hours worked by students in the three residence groups. **Dependent commuters tended to work more hours than either independent commuters or residents.** Over half (51%) of the dependent commuters worked over 10 hours per week, with 35% reporting 11-20 work hours per week and 16% reporting 21-40 hours per week. Over one-fourth of the independent commuters indicated working more than 10 hours per week. Of those, 11% worked over 20 hours. Only 12% of the residents worked 11 or more hours per week; 1% worked 21-40 hours.

Employment patterns of students in the Black Group were quite different from those of students in the Representative Sample. Fewer black residents (58%) and independent commuters (45%) did not work, but more black dependent commuters (52%) reported not working at all. Black dependent commuters also tended to work fewer hours, with 38% working over 10 hours as opposed to 51% in the Representative Sample. More black residents (22%) and black independent commuters (50%) reported working over 10 hours per week than students in the Representative Sample. Table 4 depicts the number of work hours per week by residence for students in both groups.

TABLE 4

Number of Hours Per Week of Employment by Residence Group

Hours	Residence Group: Resident	Dependent Commuter	Independent Commuter
Representative Sample (n=434)			
0	73%*	35%	57%
1-10	14%	13%	15%
11-20	11%	35%	15%
21-40	1%	16%	11%
Black Group (n=303)			
0	58%	52%	45%
1-10	18%	10%	5%
11-20	19%	23%	30%
21-40	3%	15%	20%

*Note: Cell values are expressed as percentages of the total n for each group.

Students who were employed were categorized into those working on campus and those working off campus. Significant differences were also found here among the three residence groups. **Higher percentages of resident students than dependent or independent commuters worked on campus.** The percentage of students working off campus was much higher among dependent commuters than among either of the other two groups. Differences among the residence groups on the variable of on- or off-campus employment in the Black Group were similar to those in the Representative Sample, except that black resident students were even more likely to work on campus. Percentages of students employed on campus and off campus by residence group are shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5

On- and Off-Campus Employment by Residence Group

Employment Site	Residence Group: Resident	Dependent Commuter	Independent Commuter
Representative Sample (n=207)			
On campus	40%*	7%	26%
Off campus	60%	93%	74%
Black Group (n=137)			
On campus	69%	6%	30%
Off campus	31%	94%	70%

*Note: Cell values are expressed as percentages of the total n for each group.

To sum up findings related to employment and place of residence, dependent commuters in the Representative Sample were more likely to be employed and to work more hours per week, followed by independent commuters and residents in that order. In the Black Group, independent commuters worked more hours

per week than either dependent commuters or residents. Residents, regardless of race, were more likely to work on campus; very few dependent commuters held on-campus jobs.

Involvement

This section addresses the question of whether students in the three residence groups differed in terms of freshman year involvement in the following areas: (1) **formal academic experiences** (through coursework, homework, study, independent study, research, etc.); (2) **interpersonal relationships with students;** (3) **interpersonal relationships with faculty** (outside of class); (4) **student organization experiences** (in campus activities, organizations, and events); and (5) **overall involvement.** Resident students have typically been found to be more involved in on-campus relationships and activities than commuters (Astin, 1980; Chickering, 1974; Foster, Sedlacek, and Hardwick, 1975; Harrington, 1972). Several studies (Astin, 1985; Beal and Noel, 1980; Velez, 1985) have also found a strong relationship between involvement and retention.

Means (on a five-point scale) revealed no significant differences by residence in the Representative Sample on variables relating to involvement in academic experiences, interpersonal relationships with faculty, or in overall involvement. **Resident students (M=3.8) were significantly more involved in interpersonal relationships with other students than were dependent commuters (M=3.1), with independent commuters (M=3.4) falling in between. Residents and independent commuters (M=2.4) were equally involved in student organizations and significantly more involved than dependent commuters (M=1.8).**

Fewer differences were found in the Black Group. Black resident and dependent commuter as well as independent commuter students were roughly equally involved in academic experiences and in interpersonal relationships with students and faculty. Like students in the Representative Sample, **those in the Black Group differed significantly in their involvement in student organizations.** Again, resident students (M=2.3) and independent commuters (M=2.2) were most involved, and dependent commuters (M=1.8) were least involved. Mean levels of involvement are reported in Table 6.

TABLE 6

Mean Levels of Involvement by Residence Group

Area of Involvement	Residence Group: Resident	Dependent Commuter	Independent Commuter
Representative Sample (n=429)			
Academic experiences	3.5*	3.5	3.7
Student relationships	3.8	3.1	3.4
Faculty relationships	1.8	1.8	1.9
Student organizations	2.4	1.8	2.4
Overall involvement	3.0	2.8	2.9
Black Group (n=298)			
Academic experiences	3.3	3.7	3.3
Student relationships	3.5	3.4	3.3
Faculty relationships	1.9	1.9	1.9
Student organizations	2.3	1.8	2.2
Overall involvement	2.8	2.7	2.6

*Note: Means were calculated from responses on the following scale: 1= not at all involved, 2= slightly involved, 3= somewhat involved, 4= much involved, 5= very much involved.

To summarize findings related to involvement and freshman place of residence, resident students in the Representative Sample were significantly more involved in interpersonal relationships with other students than dependent commuters. Both residents and independent commuters were significantly more involved in student organizations than dependent commuters. In the Black Group, the only area in which significant differences were found was that of involvement in student organizations. Resident students in the Black Group were significantly more involved in this area than dependent commuters.

Interpersonal Relationships

Much of the recent research on commuter students has included references to the interpersonal relationships of commuters versus residents. Commuter students have been characterized as having fewer collegiate friends and as identifying more with their high school friends (Harrington, 1972; Schuchman, 1974). Beal and Noel (1980) found that having close friends on campus is associated with higher retention rates, while having friends elsewhere has the opposite effect. Velez (1985) hypothesized that living on campus is related to having more academically oriented friends, which is in turn associated with higher retention rates.

First year students who took part in the MLS were asked to respond to several items regarding their interpersonal relationships. Differences among residence groups in the Representative Sample on each of these items were highly significant. Means were calculated on five-point scales. **Dependent commuters (M=3.1) spent the most time with people who were not students, faculty, or staff at UMCP. Residents (M=2.4) spent the least time with individuals not affiliated with UMCP, and independent commuters (M=2.8) fell about halfway between the other two groups.**

Significant differences were found among the residence groups in the Representative Sample on the number of primary relationships and casual acquaintances they had with persons affiliated with the campus. Resident students had more primary relationships as well as more casual acquaintances on campus, followed by independent commuters. Dependent commuters had the lowest number of friends in either category.

Like students in the Representative Sample, **black dependent commuters (M=3.4) spent significantly more time with those not affiliated with UMCP,** followed by black independent commuters (M=2.9), with black resident students (M=2.3) spending the smallest amount of time with people not associated with UMCP. In the Black Group, however, students in each residence group had essentially the same numbers of casual acquaintances on campus. Black resident students had significantly more primary relationships on campus than did black independent commuters. Black dependent commuters fell between these two groups in the number of primary relationships they had on campus. This pattern is somewhat different from that of the Representative Sample. Means related to these items are summarized in Table 7.

TABLE 7

Mean Ratings of Relationships by Residence Group

Type of Involvement	Residence Group: Resident	Dependent Commuter	Independent Commuter
Representative Sample (n=429)			
Relationships with persons not affiliated with UMCP	2.4	3.1	2.8
Primary relationships at UMCP	4.1	3.6	3.7
Casual relationships at UMCP	3.8	3.4	3.6
Black Group (n=298)			
Relationships with persons not affiliated with UMCP	2.3	3.4	2.9
Primary relationships at UMCP	3.7	3.5	3.1
Casual relationships at UMCP	3.6	3.5	3.6

Note: Means for the item on degree of involvement in relationships with persons not affiliated with UMCP were calculated from responses on the following scale: 1=almost none, 2=little, 3=some, 4=much, 5=very much. Means for the items on primary and casual relationships at UMCP were calculated from responses on the following scale: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. The latter two items were in the form, "I have a sufficient number of (type of relationship)."

Students were also asked to describe what they had in common with their best friends at UMCP. In answering this question, the majority of resident students in the Representative Sample identified living in the same residence hall as the characteristic they had in common with their best friends. **Dependent commuters more often identified having gone to the same high school as the basis of their relationship with their best friends.** When asked which group at UMCP they most closely identified with, dependent commuters chose friends from the same high school (37%) and other friends (34%) most often; independent commuters chose roommates (30%) and other friends (21%); and 53% of the resident students chose roommates.

Students in the Black Group were similar to those in the Representative Sample with regard to what they had in common with their best friends and to the group with which they most closely identified. Differences among residence groups on these two variables were statistically significant. More black resident students tended to identify being from the same residence hall as the characteristic they had in common with their best friends (41%); more black dependent commuters identified having gone to the same high school (41%); and black independent commuters most often chose the category including working at the same job (48%). When asked which group they most closely identified with, black resident students most often chose roommates (34%). Both black independent and dependent commuters chose high school friends most often (32% and 39%, respectively).

To highlight major findings regarding interpersonal relationships and place of residence, dependent commuters in both the Representative Sample and the Black Group spent more time with people not affiliated with UMCP and tended to identify more with high school friends than did either independent commuters or resident students. Resident students, regardless of race, in both groups had more primary relationships on campus than did students in either of the other two residence groups. In the Representative Sample, resident students also had more casual acquaintances on campus.

Sources of Support and Encouragement

Velez (1985), in his study of retention, noted the importance of significant others in influencing college performance and persistence. Noel, Levitz, and Saluri (1985) identified family obligations as a major force working against college achievement and persistence, especially when the family is not supportive of a college education. Since they live at home, dependent commuters are more likely to be influenced by their parents who may not be supportive of their educational plans for a variety of reasons (Jacoby, 1983). Patterns of support and encouragement were studied in the MLS by asking questions about the degree to which students experienced support from UMCP staff members, other students, family, and friends. At issue was whether differences existed in the degree to which residents, dependent commuters, and independent commuters felt support and encouragement from these significant persons. Patterns of support are shown in Table 8.

TABLE 8

Mean Levels of Support by Residence Group

Source of support	Residence Group: Resident	Dependent Commuter	Independent Commuter
Representative Sample (n=429)			
Staff members	1.8*	1.9	1.9
Students	3.9	3.5	3.8
Family	4.5	4.5	4.4
Friends	4.0	4.1	4.1
Black Group (n=298)			
Staff members	2.1	2.1	2.1
Students	3.6	3.4	3.6
Family	4.4	4.5	4.5
Friends	4.1	4.2	4.0

***Note:** Means were calculated from responses on the following scale: 1=almost no support, 2=little support, 3=some support, 4=much support, and 5=very much support.

All three residence groups in the Representative Sample and the Black Group experienced essentially the same levels of support from staff members, family members, and friends. The mean rating given for support received from staff members was quite low, around 2 on a five-point scale.

Dependent commuters in the Representative Sample rated support received from other students significantly lower than the other two groups. In the Black Group, dependent commuters rated such support slightly lower than residents and independent commuters. These findings are important in the light of recent research which found that students living at home are more likely to be influenced by non-students whose attitudes toward college may not be favorable (Velez, 1985).

In summary, there were no significant differences among the three residence groups in either the Representative Sample or Black Group in the degree to which these students experienced support from staff members, family members, or friends. Dependent commuters in the Representative Sample and in the Black

Group reported receiving less support from other students than did residents or independent commuters.

Institutional Identification

Resident students are often believed to feel more identified with their collegiate institution than commuters. Commuter students have been found to have less commitment to college (Beal and Noel, 1980) and lower expectations of future identification with their college as alumni (Harrington, 1972). Students who took part in the MLS responded to a variety of items related to their level of identification with UMCP.

No significant differences were found among the residence groups in the Representative Sample or the Black Group on their likelihood of choosing UMCP again, identifying with UMCP as alumni, or having positive feelings about being a student at UMCP. All means fell between 2.9 and 3.7 on a five-point scale. However, **resident students in the Representative Sample were significantly more likely to have followed one of the UMCP intercollegiate athletic teams** than either commuter group. The fact that no significant differences were found among the three residence groups in the Black Group indicates that proportionally more black commuters followed UMCP teams than other commuter students.

Mean ratings of the four areas discussed are presented in Table 9.

TABLE 9

Mean Ratings of Identification With UMCP by Residence Group

Area	Residence Group: Resident	Dependent Commuter	Independent Commuter
Representative Sample (n=429)			
Positive feelings	3.7*	3.7	3.7
Identify as alumnus	3.0	2.9	3.0
Choose UM again	3.4	3.5	3.3
Follow team	3.5	2.9	3.0
Black Group (n=298)			
Positive feelings	3.5	3.3	3.4
Identify as alumnus	3.2	3.3	3.4
Choose UM again	3.1	3.2	3.1
Follow team	3.5	3.2	3.3

*Note: Means are calculated from responses on the following scale: 1=not at all, 2=little, 3=neutral or undecided, 4=much, and 5=very much.

Satisfaction

Closely related to the area of identification with UMCP is the of degree of satisfaction with the college experience. Satisfaction with college has been found to have a strong positive relationship to retention (Beal and Noel, 1980). Commuter students are usually assumed to be less satisfied with their college experience.

Students participating in the MLS were asked about their degree of satisfaction with their college experience and with their life as a whole since entering UMCP.[3] **There were no significant differences among residence groups with regard to satisfaction with the college experience during their first year at UMCP.** Means hovered between 3 and 4 on a five-point scale. resident students in both the Representative Sample and the Black Group were slightly more satisfied with their college experience than were dependent and independent commuters. Regarding satisfaction with life as whole, independent commuters in the Representative Sample were slightly less satisfied than residents or dependent commuters. Mean levels of satisfaction are reported in Table 10.

TABLE 10

Mean Levels of Satisfaction by Residence Group

Area of satisfaction	Residence Group: Resident	Dependent Commuter	Independent Commuter
Representative Sample (n=429)			
Satisfaction with college as a whole	3.6	3.5	3.3
Satisfaction with life as a whole	3.8	3.8	3.6
Black Group (n=298)			
Satisfaction with college as a whole	3.4	3.1	3.1
Satisfaction with life as a whole	3.5	3.6	3.5

Note: Means were calculated from responses to items in the form "I am satisfied with _____" where responses were coded 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree.

IV: PROFILES AND IMPLICATIONS

What, then, are the major differences between the three residence groups in their freshman year experience? One way of answering this question is to profile each residence group in terms of the eight areas discussed in Section III. Again, it is important to emphasize that the data upon which these profiles are based were collected in the spring of students' first year at UMCP.

Profile of Residents

Resident students in both the Representative Sample and the Black Group tended to **choose UMCP because of its academic programs.** This reason was given most often by students in the Black Group regardless of residence status.

Although resident students most frequently reported selecting UMCP for its academic programs, **they did not have significantly higher academic expectations** than the other two residence groups. Black resident students, in fact, had slightly lower expectations than black commuters in the areas of graduating with honors and being elected to an academic honor society.

Significant differences were found between residents and commuters in the area of employment. Residents were **far less likely to be employed.** Those who were employed **worked significantly fewer hours** than commuters. In addition, **a much higher proportion of residents who worked held jobs on, rather than off, campus.**

Resident students, regardless of race, were **significantly more involved in student organizations than dependent commuters. They tended to spend the least time with persons not affiliated with UMCP** and to identify living in the same residence hall as the characteristic they had in common with their best friends. Differences in amount of time spent with persons at UMCP and in characteristics of best friends were significant in both the Representative Sample and the Black Group. **Resident students in the Representative Sample also had significantly more primary relationships and casual acquaintances on campus. Black resident students had more primary relationships on campus** than did students in either black commuter group. Not surprisingly, resident students in the Representative Sample felt that they received significantly more support from other students than did dependent commuters. However, this was not true for the Black Group.

Resident students in the Representative Sample did not report a significantly higher level of identification with UMCP than the two commuter groups except in one area: residents were significantly more likely to follow one of the UMCP athletic teams. This trend was also evident in the Black Group. **Residents in both the Representative Sample and the Black Group were slightly, but not significantly, more satisfied with their college experience than commuters.**

Profile of Dependent Commuters

Looking at dependent commuters, a very different picture emerges. **Dependent commuters in the Representative Sample most often chose UMCP because of its location and inexpensive tuition.** In the Black Group, the most popular reason given by dependent commuters was academic programs. However, dependent commuters **did not differ from the other two residence groups in the Representative Sample or the Black Group in terms of their academic expectations.**

Dependent commuters in the Representative Sample were significantly more likely to be employed and worked more hours than students in the other residence groups. The vast majority of dependent commuters reported working off campus. Black dependent commuters tended to work less frequently and to work fewer hours than dependent commuters in the Representative Sample. It is not surprising, therefore, that dependent commuters in the Representative Sample were significantly less involved than resident students in interpersonal relationships and organizations at UMCP.

Dependent commuters can also be distinguished from the other residence groups by their relationship patterns. These students were **more likely to associate with persons not affiliated with UMCP and to identify individuals with whom they attended high school as their best friends.** They also most often reported friends from the same high school as the group with whom they identified at UMCP. In the Representative Sample, dependent commuters had **significantly fewer primary relationships and casual acquaintances on campus** than resident students. Dependent commuters in the Representative Sample reported receiving significantly less support from fellow students than did resident students. These last two findings, however, did not hold true for black dependent commuters.

Dependent commuters were slightly less satisfied than residents with their college experience and were least likely to follow a UMCP athletic team. In terms of identification with and positive feelings about UMCP, there were no significant differences among residence groups.

Profile of Independent Commuters

Independent commuters chose UMCP most frequently because of its location and academic programs, with the latter reason being cited most often in the Black Group. Independent commuters had very similar academic expectations to both dependent commuters and residents.

Independent commuters in the Representative Sample reported working more than residents but less than dependent commuters. The Black Group was different in that independent commuters were more likely to be employed and to work more hours per week than black students in either of the other residence groups. Overall, independent commuters were more likely to be employed on campus than dependent commuters but less likely than residents.

With regard to involvement, **independent commuters in the Representative Sample were more involved in interpersonal relationships with fellow students than were dependent commuters, but not as involved as residents. Independent commuters were approximately as involved as residents in student organizations and overall. In the Black Group, independent commuters reported less overall involvement than resident students.**

Black independent commuters most often identified with high school friends and chose as their best friend someone from their work situation. In the Black Group, independent commuters had **significantly fewer primary relationships on campus than the other two residence groups. Independent commuters in the Representative Sample displayed a somewhat different pattern. They were more likely to report their off-campus roommates as the persons with whom they identified.** The means for independent commuters in the Representative Sample fell between those of the other two groups with regard to the number of both primary relationships and casual acquaintances on campus. Independent commuters in both the Representative Sample and the Black Group received nearly the same amount of support from fellow students as did residents.

Finally, in the Representative Sample, independent commuters resembled dependent commuters in that both of these groups were significantly less likely to follow a UMCP athletic team than residents. This pattern was also found among black students although the differences among the three residence groups was not significant.

IMPLICATIONS

What are the implications of these findings for UMCP staff and faculty? This report shows that commuter and resident students arrive at UMCP with similar aptitudes (as reflected by their SAT scores) and with similar expectations for academic success. They begin their college experience with equal degrees of identification with the institution they have selected and with basically equal levels

of satisfaction with college. However, as early as the second semester of their freshman year, commuters are significantly less involved in key aspects of campus life, *i.e.*, on-campus jobs, student organizations, and relationships with persons affiliated with UMCP.

For example, it has been shown that **UMCP commuters, especially dependent commuters, tended to work more hours and to work at off- rather than on-campus jobs.** National research indicates that students who work on campus have higher retention rates than students who work off-campus or not at all. This likely occurs because students who work on campus feel more connected to the institution, are more informed about services and opportunities available, and have more and stronger relationships with persons associated with the campus. **Commuter students need to be better informed about the benefits of working on campus, available job opportunities, and how to apply for them. More campus departments should recruit commuters to apply for on-campus jobs.**

Dependent commuters had fewer relationships and acquaintances on campus than residents. They spent most of their time with persons not affiliated with UMCP and identified as their best friends individuals with whom they attended high school. This finding is important in the light of recent research which found that students living at home are more likely to be influenced by non-students whose attitudes towards college may not be favorable (Velez, 1985).

Not surprisingly, dependent commuters were significantly less involved in student organizations than were either residents or independent commuters. In the freshman year, an unfortunate cycle is already present: students who are less involved with other students lack an informal campus information network, and students who lack such a network are less likely to become involved in campus activities and organizations. Because national studies indicate that involvement in campus activities increases retention rates, **additional efforts to inform commuter students of campus activities and organizations and to encourage their participation are called for.**

Future MLS data analyses may reveal that differences between commuters and residents in these areas increase over their years at UMCP and that commuters have a lower rate of persistence to graduation, as shown in the national studies of Astin (1975) and Velez (1985). An important observation is that **the percentage of commuter students versus resident students increases substantially throughout the college years and that, overall, 75% of UMCP undergraduates are commuters.**

It is hoped that this report will encourage discussion and examination of practices, programs, and services based on the findings highlighted within it. An awareness of the early differences in students' experiences at UMCP can assist faculty and staff in enhancing the educational experiences of commuters and breaking the negative patterns documented by national trends.

END NOTES

[1]To obtain a copy of the introductory Maryland Longitudinal Study report, **A Descriptive Overview: The study's purpose, goals, features, participants, and design,** write: Maryland Longitudinal Study, The University of Maryland College Park, 2108 North Administration Building, College Park, MD 20742.

[2]Analyses involving two categorical variables were done using chi-square procedures; those involving a continuous variable as the dependent variable were analyzed using a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA). The latter procedure allows multiple dependent variables to be run while holding the overall error rate constant. An .05 level of significance was used in all analyses. Some levels of categorical variables were collapsed because of missing data. The method of mean substitution was used in the multiple analysis of variance in order to obtain an optimum number of usable cases. For cases which had missing values on any of the dependent variables, the mean value for the sample on that variable was substituted for the missing value. Since the primary focus of this study was not on the differences between the Representative Sample and the Black Group, these groups were not compared directly, although the means are separately reported for each group.

[3]MLS Research Report #2 describes students' satisfaction in greater detail and for subsequent years in college. No significant differences were found between the Representative Sample and the Black Group on overall level of satisfaction, using the College Student Satisfaction Questionnaire. See note 1 above for information on how to obtain a copy of this report.

The Maryland Longitudinal Study (MLS) is a research undertaking of the Division of Student Affairs at The University of Maryland College Park. A significant number of Student Affairs staff have been involved in the study since its inception. A Steering Committee appointed by the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs has been responsible for the methodolgy, data collection, and management of this project. These individuals are listed in Appendix A of the MLS report entitled "The Maryland Longitudinal Study — A Descriptive Overview: The Study's Purpose, Goals, Features, Participants, and Design."

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